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EVERY object that exists has extension. The extension may be infinitesimal or vast and immeasurable. But if there is no extension, it becomes a dimensionless point. Similarly, if something exists at all, it exists over a period of time. Even if it be an elementary particle that makes its appearance for only a billionth of a second, that period constitutes its duration. Large and small are relative terms which are measures in the scale of our experience. Nothing is large or small in itself. It is just what it is.

Our thinking has as its basis our experience of things. We are cognizant of the world around us. The things there are felt and perceived by us in certain ways. We see them also in certain relations among themselves. It is only when our thought is

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in accordance with all this that it has any validity. If we think in a way that contradicts the facts of our experience and of the world in which we live, to which we are related, we are like Alice in Wonderland. As the things around us are in space and time, these enter also into our thinking. An image in our minds has extension like any object in the outer world, and it exists for a length of time, even though that length may be a fraction of a second.

We cannot really imagine a dimensionless point, even though we speak of it. When we want to imagine such a point, we have to begin with a line or a circle and make it less and less. The process of approximation becomes a substitute for the point. Nor can we form an image of nothing, although we may think we do. That is one of the illusions of our minds. I am saying this because the moment which can be described as the present moment is such a point which exists impalpably on a line that represents the past, the present and the future. We may also think of the present as a line dividing the past from the future, but a line so thin that it

hardly exists. We may imagine the future as flowing over it into the past, although the future cannot be regarded as existing except in thought. The past also exists only in our consciousness, as it is over and gone. It is only the present which exists actually but when we think of something as being in the present, that mental image is already in the field of memory and becomes an impression of the past. The present is a constantly advancing front, with the past associated with it trailing behind it in the form of memory.

It is only on the basis of our memory that we are able to think. No thought would be possible if there were no memory at all. Without images in our minds which we can move about like so many objects on a flat surface, we cannot reason. We place them in different positions to perceive their relationships, and this is our thinking apart from imagination or image-making. We accomplish all this, as we do so many things with the body, without noticing the process.

The essential nature of consciousness is to reflect what *is*, to perceive and record, a

simple act. Thinking is much more complex. If we only perceive without any thought, we will perceive a certain thing and then go on to something else, so that the perceiving consciousness is like a wave that moves forward all the time. A wave has a front and there are many points on that front. We are aware of the presence of many things simultaneously. Consciousness is an expanse which can embrace many things at once. It can illuminate a whole field of objects. It is really very much like space which includes all objects.

Memory is essential not only for thought but also for dealing practically with things. Without memory of the things with which we have to do we will be lost in this world. In evolution there is a continually increased capacity for remembering. Our memory is much subtler and more inclusive than that of any animal. A developed animal such as an elephant may remember certain events for a long time. But our memory is a larger expanse; it includes ideas and experiences that belong exclusively to the human stage.

Past Overshadows the Present

If we merely remembered the facts of the past, that factual remembrance would not handicap or modify the action of consciousness in the present. We think, feel and respond to events only in the present, and this action can be fresh and unaffected by any reactions from the past which we may recollect. It can be, but unfortunately is not, generally speaking. The existence of a record of the past need not interfere with action in the present. Why is it then that it so interferes, predetermines the action of the mind, depriving it of its freedom? The predetermination arises from a link of causation between the memories and the present consciousness. Unless there is this relationship of cause and effect, the past is over, it does not actually exist, and it need not affect the present at all. But in our unawareness, every moment begets the next, and to some extent determines its nature. There is a certain state of consciousness at one moment; at the next moment there is the same state modified by fresh impacts and reactions which

are from the state that first existed. The link between the two moments is not a mere sequence in time but is psychologically created by the forces that arise from the past and affect the present state of consciousness. They are forces of attraction and repulsion, likes and dislikes, hopes and fears.

Something happened yesterday. I was insulted, or thought I was, which is often the case even when no insult is meant. The hurt feeling continues. It affects my thinking and behavior now. We see that here is a certain force arising from the memory of an event that occurred in the past and operating in the present. To take another instance. I had a pleasurable experience yesterday. The fact is registered in my consciousness. But when I recall the experience, there is a force that arises from the record in my memory, which is desire for that experience. This force directs my thinking at the present moment through an attachment to that experience. If I go in for that experience again, the desire is only strengthened thereby, and I crave for that experience over and over again. All desire arises from memory of

experiences in the past but operates and modifies thought and action in the present. We cannot desire anything we have never known. Desire cannot exist without a basis. We may experience a new sensation, it may come to us, but when we think we desire something new, actually we desire a certain sensation already in the memory; we perhaps desire it with the stimulation of fresh associations. Among the forces which have their basis in the past are our fears which inhibit the flow, the natural action, of the energies within us. We can easily find numerous other instances from our own experience of how the past dogs and overshadows the present.

The Process of Attachment

Even when the consciousness is but a tiny germ, it can get attached. An insect crawls to the place in the flower where the honey is to be found. It has been there before and liked the taste of the honey. Even though its consciousness is but a tiny thing, it has formed an attachment to the sensation it has

enjoyed and is drawn to it mechanically. The process of forming attachments is continuous from childhood. Life means contacts of various kinds, and when a contact is agreeable, causes a gratifying sensation, the mind attaches itself to that sensation. This takes place automatically when it is not awake to the process.

Everything built up loses its strength in course of time, and the brain also loses its vitality and coherence with age. But there are changes that come about, not due to any physical cause but because of the very manner in which the mind works in a state of unawareness. We are here making a distinction between brain and mind, giving the latter an independent status. If life is a product of matter as most men of science thought in the last century, and perhaps many do even now, then with the deterioration of body life must wither, and when the body dies, life and consciousness along with it must go out for ever, like the flame of a wick that has been consumed. But in a deep view of the matter, and that is the Theosophical view, life and consciousness may be manifestations of an energy that is the

basis of the universe and manifests itself in diverse ways, however much it may need a material organization for its expression. In any case, we can see how consciousness limits itself. It forms ideas on various matters, not only morals, religion, philosophy and so forth, but even more definitely on personal matters such as our wants, satisfactions and rights. These ideas stay in the mind, because the mind becomes attached to them, and then the whole process of thought takes place in relation to them, revolves around them. Man is a thinker, as the derivation of the word "man" indicates. He is constantly engaged in ideation of different sorts. There cannot be anything wrong with forming ideas or in enjoying something pleasant, that is, in registering a pleasant sensation. But complications develop when we become attached to the sensations or the ideas. Every attachment is a tether. Mentally and emotionally we erect walls around ourselves. These walls constitute a prison within which the mind is confined. It remains within the enclosure and projects various ideas from there. All these ideas spring from the ground of our

conditioning, that is the ground of our experiences and our reactions to them. The ambitious man has a picture before him of his own importance, which he seeks to realize. Similarly one who is afraid projects shadows of what may happen to him.

If the present consciousness lets go its attachments, which are really to its own memories, then immediately there is a change of vast consequence. The memories will not cease to exist, but it will be in a state of freedom and natural wholeness. The past will turn into a mere landscape. It is said that the Buddha could remember all the events of all his past incarnations. Surely that remembrance did not in any way affect his serenity, the freedom he had achieved, or his benign attitude towards all beings and things. The past was just a map unrolled before him.

Consciousness in Its Natural State

When the mind is exercising itself over the past and the future, preoccupied with the past and projecting the future, it has

little root or interest in the present. Its energies are not there, except for a modicum. Divided and pulled in different directions, the consciousness is not in its natural state but in a state of brokenness and tension. The natural state is the unmodified state, whereas the modified state is a condition in which the substance of consciousness has been processed and built into structure of different sorts. It is a condition in which both the sensitiveness and freedom which belong to the nature and action of consciousness in its purity are lost almost entirely.

It is only consciousness that is in a pure undivided state that can reflect the truth of whatever it touches, and in this truth is the significance of the thing or event. We cannot say that each moment as we live it is significant. There are a few moments in our lives which are. These are very few. They are moments of beauty, of love and happiness, of enlightenment, revelatory of something we had not previously known. For the rest, our lives are commonplace, often a long-drawn-out monotony devoid of any real meaning.

Whether a moment is significant or not depends upon the state of mind and heart and its response at the moment. Irrespective of outer conditions every moment can be a moment of significance. If I am suffering the monotony of the present in the hope that I will arrive at a point when I will enjoy the sensation I anticipate, which sensation is a reflection of experiences I have had in the past, I am really projecting from the past a picture which seems to me to be significant, and all that I am doing at present is to travel slowly or impatiently towards that picture which, ultimately may turn out to be a mirage. Life is action outwardly and also with one's thought and feelings, and any moment can have a significance, depending not on what happens from without but upon the action from within. In other words, the significance arises from the whole condition of the individual at the moment. If this is true, this truth opens out a whole vista of what life can mean.

The consciousness of man, in its compounded state, that is, broken into various fragments which are then kept together as a seeming whole, partakes of the nature of matter

and functions mechanically. It falls into such a condition when it is unawake. Being partly asleep or dreaming, it does not respond fully nor see clearly; then it is largely habit or momentum which works. Events take place by themselves in the field of thought as well as in outer relationships. In dreaming there is consciousness of a sort, but because of the absence of an alert intelligence, the dream lacks coherence and rationality. When we are mechanically acting, we do not give full attention to whatever touches us nor act with our whole capacity. We look at something beautiful, but are not touched in the core of our being. We remark that it is beautiful perhaps vaguely or conventionally, and pass on to something else. It is just a superficial response. That is how our life is lived for the most part, and why it is so unsatisfactory. An action or response, to be perfect or complete, must be with the totality of being. There cannot be any depth in activities of the mind in terms of words and symbols. The depth is in one's being, one's soul. The soul is that nature in ourselves which responds to everything that exists. It is the sensitivity which

resides there and its wholeness that can make every moment a perfect moment, perfect in the sense of complete, not depending on the past or the future. To allow this nature to act, there has to be a fundamental change which is denuding ourselves of the layers or strata of accumulations that adhere to our true being, but are foreign and opposed to it.

The essential nature of ourselves, which is the underlying nature, is a mirror that reflects not only the superficial aspects of things but also the hidden lines of their beauty, the motions of their soul, what the poet senses perhaps vaguely. As a lover may be imagined as able to enter into the soul of his beloved, even so it may be possible to enter into the soul of the universe as well as the soul of each thing in it, see it in all its loveliness, its archetypal perfection. Shri Krishna speaks of Himself as the essence manifested in the perfection of each distinct thing that exists. The divine nature is in all things, in each in a unique form. It is only as we perceive and respond to the divinity in it that we know its truth, the significance that lies in its very existence and its relation to all other things.

Beauty in any object does not derive its significance from anything external to itself. The only true response to it is that which comes from the heart, a response that takes place when there is no impediment to it. At the same time as everything is related to everything else, there is the significance also in each relationship.

Although the photographic negative of our consciousness becomes overlaid and processed by impressions that adhere to it and by reactions of different sorts, and thus loses its capacity to reflect the true nature of things, the extraordinary thing about it is that it can deprocess itself, shed its accumulation and return to its original state. This it can do only by an awareness of the changes that take place and by feeling the possibility and desirability of freeing itself from the condition which has developed in its unawareness, which is the real ignorance. When it is again in its own pure state and awake, then everything that touches it communicates to it its full and deep significance. Every event that occurs becomes a key that turns the consciousness and unlocks a facet of the mystery

that resides there. Each moment then has its own uniqueness and beauty. Whatever is seen in that state is new, for the newness is in the consciousness itself.

BOOKS BY MR. N. SRI RAM

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